

Natural Resources Conservation Service

MEMBERSHIP BALANCE PLAN

1. Committee's Official Designation

Task Force on Agricultural Air Quality Research

2. Authority

The USDA Agricultural Air Quality Task Force (AAQTF) is being renewed due to the requirement of section 391 of the Federal Agriculture Improvement and Reform Act of 1996 (FAIR Act), which directs the Chief of the Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to establish an advisory committee to address agricultural air quality issues. The Chief of NRCS is responsible for preparing an AAQTF charter under section 9(c) of the Federal Advisory Committee Act (FACA), amended December 21, 1982, 5 U.S.C. App. 2.

3. Objectives and Scope of Activities

The 1990 Clean Air Act requires the monitoring and controlling of particulates of size 10 micrometers in diameter and smaller. Many areas, particularly in the Western United States, experience concentrations of these particulates which exceed the 1987 Federal health standards. The FAIR Act addresses Agricultural Air Quality Research Oversight. In section 391 of the Act, the United States Congress reports that:

- a. A number of studies have alleged that agriculture is a source of PM-10 emissions.
- b. Many of these studies have often been based on erroneous data.
- c. Federal research activities are currently being conducted by the Department of Agriculture (USDA) to determine the true extent to which agricultural activities contribute to air pollution and to determine cost-effective ways in which the agricultural industry can reduce air pollution.
- d. Any policy recommendations that may be issued by any Federal agency to address air pollution problems related to agriculture or any other industrial activity should be based on sound scientific findings that are subject to adequate peer review and should take into account economic feasibility.

The AAQTF will advise the Secretary of Agriculture regarding the scientific basis of the impact of agriculture on air quality. The intent of this effort will be to:

- a. Strengthen vital research efforts related to agricultural air quality;
- b. Determine the extent to which agricultural activities contribute to air pollution;
- c. Determine cost-effective ways in which the agricultural industry can improve air quality;
- d. Coordinate and ensure intergovernmental cooperation on research activities related to agricultural air quality issues to avoid duplication and ensure data quality and sound interpretation of data; and
- e. Advise the Secretary on the role of the Secretary for providing oversight and coordination related to agricultural air quality.

4. Points of View Needed for the Committee

Nominations for the AAQTF are solicited through publication in the **Federal Register** of a **Notice of Request for Nominations**. The nomination must be in writing and provide the appropriate background documents required by USDA policy including form AD-755. After the solicitation period has closed (45 days), a USDA interagency committee is assembled by the AAQTF Designated Federal Official to evaluate all nominees and make Secretarial recommendations on task force appointments.

There are no legal limits to the number of members; however, the AAQTF is currently composed of a minimum of 20 members, who by law, are comprised of employees of USDA, industry representatives, and other experts in the fields of agriculture and air quality. The Chief of NRCS serves as the Chairperson of AAQTF. An NRCS employee is designated as the federal official for AAQTF. AAQTF will make a concerted effort to continue locating and providing information to all protected groups informing them of the **Notice to Request for Nominations** and to implement and enforce outreach strategy where there is significant disproportionate services rendered to specific minority groups.

Members are appointed by the Secretary of Agriculture to serve a 2-year term. The entire committee membership must be appointed or reappointed after each 2-year term.

The members of the AAQTF, to the extent practical, are required to: (1) have scientific knowledge of agricultural air quality issues; and/or (2) actively be involved in the production of food and fiber; and/or (3) have knowledge of human health/regulatory issues related to air quality; and/or (4) actively involved in agricultural related businesses.

The AAQTF regulation requires adherence to equal opportunity practices consistent with USDA policy. Nomination for membership is open to all minorities, women, and persons with disabilities in areas designated within the United States, Caribbean Area (Puerto Rico and the Virgin Islands), and the Pacific Basin Area (Guam, American Samoa, and the Commonwealth of the Northern Mariana Islands).

In order to provide one-on-one contacts to all segments of the affected public about the proposed AAQTF rule, public notification and outreach efforts must be aggressively expanded to include news releases, internet web postings, publications, one-on-one contact, and brochures to ensure those traditionally under-served will have an equal opportunity to participate in the AAQTF.

The AAQTF may also utilize and work in partnership with the USDA Office of Outreach and the NRCS Outreach and Advocacy Division to locate and provide information to all protected groups.

A press release announcing the issuance of the newly proposed AAQTF will be electronically sent nationwide to all protected groups. The press release will contain a contact person (Designated Federal Official) for obtaining further information.

NRCS will submit information for publication in the national newsletters of several national agricultural organizations. These include American Agri-Women, WAgN (Women's Agricultural Network), MANRRS (Minorities in Agriculture, Natural Resources, and Related Sciences), WIFE (Women Involved in Farm Economics), and the National Agri-Ability Project (between 22,000-30,000 landowners with disabilities receive the Breaking New Ground Newsletter). Spanish-translated press release and informational materials will also be made available.

NRCS will also implement other outreach solutions such as:

- Increase the participation by mentoring new AAQTF members;
- Use appropriate language and media sources to reach the intended audience; and
- Measure the success of AAQTF.

NRCS will make every effort to reach all eligible members through various means including internet web postings, newspapers, magazines, local publications, radio, personal contact, meetings, newsletters, churches, organizations, community advocacy groups, etc.

Special efforts will be made to distribute the information through personal mailings and contacts to potential participants who are minorities, women, or persons with disabilities. The NRCS Office of Outreach and Advocacy has prepared memoranda to Presidents and Deans of the 1890 Tribal Colleges seeking nominations. It is anticipated this will increase American Indian Tribal participation.

NRCS continues to inform and educate conservation partners and producers about air quality issues, concerns, and conservation practices that can help mitigate those negative effects of impaired air quality. This will help to address challenges or mitigating factors undermining outreach for agricultural air quality concerns, especially the AAQTF future membership.

Every effort will be made to ensure that the membership of this committee is balanced. USDA recognizes that committee membership is not static and may change depending on the work of the committee. USDA also recognizes that the field of agricultural air quality is quite specialized and that there is a limited pool of prospective candidates with adequate knowledge of agricultural air quality issues.

5. Other Balance Factors

An effort will be made to provide a balance of points of view from a range of agricultural interests, as well as to appoint members from multiple regions of the United States. Nominations will be sought from underserved populations and those individuals representing environmental organizations and interest groups.

Equal opportunity practices in accordance with USDA policies will be followed in all appointments to the committee. To ensure that the recommendations of the committee have taken into account the needs of the diverse groups served by USDA, membership will include, to the extent possible, individuals with demonstrated ability to represent minorities, women, and persons with disabilities.

USDA prohibits discrimination in all of its programs and activities on the basis of race, color, national origin, age, disability, and where applicable, sex, marital status, familial status, parental status, religion, sexual orientation, political beliefs, genetic information, reprisal, or because all or part of an individual's income is derived from any public assistance program.

6. Quorum Requirements

All AAQTF members are equal in status on the committee. A simple majority vote of members present at any official AAQTF national meeting will constitute a quorum.

7. Candidate Identification Process

(a) As described in section 4, a broad cross-section of the population with interest in agricultural air quality will be sought in the nomination process for the AAQTF.

(b) Key NRCS staff who are involved in determining balance on the AAQTF are:

- Designated Federal Official
- Outreach and Advocacy Division Director
- Civil Rights Division
- Air Quality and Atmospheric Change Team
- Deputy Chief for Science and Technology
- Chief

(c) Vacancies on the committee (AAQTF) will either not be filled, or an effort will be made to fill the vacancy with an individual best representing the person who leaves the committee.

(d) There is no term limit for AAQTF membership; however, sufficient turnover to ensure that new and varied perspectives are represented on the committee will be sought and achieved.

Once candidates have been identified, their names and background data are submitted to the USDA White House Liaison's office for vetting. The vetting process includes a background check to determine if any of the candidates have a conflict of interest that would prohibit them from serving on the committee due to criminal or ethical violations.

8. Subcommittee Balance

Any AAQTF subcommittees will seek to have fair and balanced representation of viewpoints and backgrounds as is sought and achieved for the full committee.

9. Other

10. Date Prepared or Updated

Prepared and updated January 28, 2015.